United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/896
23 May 1991

THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council holds consultations on situation in occupied Arab territories.

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees sends 45 Scandinavian field officers to Baghdad to strengthen its humanitarian operations in Iraq.

- Secretary-General to embark on three-week trip to Africa and Europe during which he will attend OAU summit; witness signing of agreement between Government of Angola and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA); attend high-level meeting in Geneva of United Nations humanitarian agencies involved in Gulf crisis, among other things.

- Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices against Palestinians and other Arabs in the occupied territories begins two-week field mission to Syria, Jordan and Egypt.

* * *

The Security Council held consultations today on the situation in the Israeli occupied territories following the deportation over the weekend of four Palestinians, including two staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), from the Gaza Strip.

Speaking to correspondents before the meeting, United States Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering said his delegation was circulating a draft presidential statement which would call on Israel to abide by the the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention on protection of civilians in time of war. The text also stated that expulsions might have a negative impact on the current peace process in the region.

The President of the Security Council, on 15 March, had issued a statement on behalf of its members in which he had called on Israel to refrain from deporting Palestinians and to ensure their safe return.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

* * *

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today sent 45 Scandinavian field officers to Baghdad to strengthen its humanitarian operations in three Iraqi provinces.

A UNHCR communique issued today in Geneva said the field officers would establish relief stations on routes used by Iraqis returning home from Iran and Turkey.

Reporting from Geneva, a United Nations press officer said a senior UNHCR delegation was on its way to the region to discuss with coalition officials the hand-over to the agency of all humanitarian missions in northern Iraq. The delegation would consult with coalition officers on the time-table and logistics of UNHCR's plan to assume full responsibility for all humanitarian relief operations including food, medical assistance and voluntary repatriation programmes in the area.

According to UNHCR field reports, more than 320,000 Iraqis had left encampments along with mountainous frontier with Turkey and were headed for home. A spontaneous repatriation movement from Iran was also gaining momentum and field workers estimated that more than 200,000 refugees had returned to their villages.

According to UNHCR, about 120,000 refugees remained on the Iraq/Turkey border, with about 1.3 million Iraqis in Iran.

* * *

Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar will leave New York over the weekend on a three-week trip to Africa and Europe, which will take him first to Morocco for talks with King Hassan II.

On 26 May, he will travel to Algiers for talks with President Chadli Bendjedid and other Algerian officials before moving on to Lisbon, where on 31 May, he will witness the signing of the cease-fire agreement reached on 1 May between the Government of Angola and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

On 1 June, the Secretary-General will return to Africa, where on 3 and 4 June he will attend the regular summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Abuja, Nigeria.

He will then pay an official visit to Sierra Leone on 5 and 6 June, and to Guinea-Bissau on 9 and 10 June.

On 13 June he will go to Geneva for a high-level meeting of United Nations humanitarian agencies on the Gulf crisis.

(more)

On 14 June, the Secretary-General will travel to Bern where he will attend the ceremonies marking the 700th anniversary of the Swiss confederation after which he will return to New York.

* * *

The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories yesterday began a two-week field mission to Syria, Jordan and Egypt.

The Committee will review the latest developments relating to the human rights situation in the territories occupied by Israel. It will also collect the testimony of persons with first-hand experience of the situation.

In its 1990 report to the Assembly, the Committee stated that the period under consideration had been marked by a further escalation of the tension in the occupied territories, which had now reached a very dangerous level. Urgent measures were needed, the report stated, to avoid the grave human rights violations and ensure the effective protection of basic rights and freedoms.

The report also indicated a trend towards the hardening of repression and the worsening of the already precarious human rights situation of the Arab civilian population.

In the absence of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Committee called for the full application by Israel of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention on protection of civilians in time of war as well as Security Council resolutions on the subject.

In a separate development, UNRWA has protested to the Israeli authorities in the occupied Gaza Strip concerning incidents in which two of the Agency's international staff members had allegedly been struck and abused by Israeli border police.

According to UNRWA, the incidents occurred last Friday in the Shaboura quarter of the Rafah refugee camp when Agency staff attempted to intervene with Israeli border police contingents who had been reported to be mistreating camp residents.

In a written protest to the Israeli Civil Administration in Gaza, UNRWA said it was "very concerned about the increasing number of assaults on its staff by members of the border police". The Agency said those acts were incompatible with Israel's obligations to facilitate UNRWA's tasks. The UNRWA has asked for an investigation into the latest incidents.

* *** *